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Aishwarya Rai Bachchan leaves ED office in Delhi after being questioned for five hours in connection with the 'Panama Papers' | PARVEEN NEGI | P9

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Aadhaar-voter ID link bill pushed in LS

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

THE Lok Sabha on Monday passed the Election Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2021 amid ruckus by Opposition members, who strongly protested the proposed seeding of the electoral rolls with Aadhaar. They argued that the move could disenfranchise voters and infringe upon the privacy of citizens.

The Lok Sabha passed the bill with voice vote following a brief discussion.

After the Bill's passage, Lok Sabha was adjourned for the day as the Opposition slammed the government for rushing the bill through the House in a "tearing hurry" and insisted that it be sent to the Parliamentary standing committee for more scrutiny. The government, however, remained unmoved, saying that the legislation has been introduced after wider consultations among the stakeholders. CONTINUED ON: P9

ANTI-CONVERSION BILL TO BE TABLED IN ASSEMBLY TODAY

Offences to be non-bailable, attract jail term of up to 3 years, fine of ₹1 lakh

NAUSHAD BIJAPUR @ Belagavi

AMID opposition from various quarters, the contentious anti-conversion Bill will, at last, be tabled in the Legislative Assembly on Tuesday. The state cabinet approved the Bill at its meeting at Suvarna Vidhan Soudha on Monday and sources confirmed that it will be brought before the Assembly on Tuesday.

Among several other clauses, the proposed bill suggests up to 10 years imprisonment and places the 'burden of proof' on the accused who facilitates conversion by way of force or coercion.

The draft of the Karnataka Protection of Right to Freedom of Religion Bill 2021, a copy of which is available with *The New Indian Express*, provides for the protection of the right to freedom of religion and prohibition of unlawful conversion from one religion to another by misrepresentation, force, undue influence, coercion, allurement or any other fraudulent means.

The Bill states, "Any marriage done for the sole purpose of unlawful conversion or vice-versa by the man of one religion with a woman of another religion, either by converting himself before or after marriage or by converting the woman before or after marriage will be declared null and void by the Family Court."

Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai in the Assembly in Belagavi on Monday | EXPRESS

One who desires to convert should give a declaration 30 days in advance to the deputy commissioner concerned, while the man performing the conversion too needs to give 30 days advance notice to the DC. After a subsequent inquiry by officials, if the DC concludes there is a commission of an offence, he can direct the police to initiate action, the Bill explains.

The offences registered under the Bill will be cognisable and non-bailable. Imprisonment shall not be less than three years but may stretch up to five years. However, for a conversion involving a minor, woman or a person belonging to SC or ST, the jail term is for three years which may extend up to ten years with a fine of Rs 50,000.

In respect of mass conversion, the one who breaches the law will be imprisoned for three years and a fine of Rs 1 lakh. The victim of conversion will get a compensation of up to Rs 5 lakh payable by the accused.

Explaining its necessity, the bill states, "In recent years, several instances of conversion by means of allurement, coercion, force and also mass conversion have been noticed which caused disturbances of public order in the state."

MORE REPORTS: P4

Panel proposes 6 more seats in Jammu, one in Kashmir

FAYAZ WANI & KUMAR VIKRAM @ Srinagar/New Delhi

OF the seven additional seats that will be created in Jammu and Kashmir following a redrawing of the Union Territory's Assembly seats, the delimitation commission has proposed that six seats will go to the Jammu region and only one to Kashmir.

The proposal, spelt out at a meeting of the commission with its five associate members in New Delhi on Monday, has expectedly upset Kashmir-based political parties, which had hoped that the panel would increase four seats in Kashmir and three in Jammu.

The parties' expectation is based on the 2011 census. As per the census, J&K has a population of 122.39 lakh of which 68.88 lakh, or 56.28%, are in Kashmir and 53.50 lakh, or 43.71%, are in Jammu. The delimitation exercise, too, is being carried out as per the 2011 census.

If the proposal goes through, the 90-member Assembly will have 43 members from Jammu and 47 from Kashmir. Before the revocation of special status under Article 370 and the bifurcation of J&K and Ladakh, the Assembly had a total strength of 87 with 46 in Kashmir, 37 in Jammu and four in Ladakh.

After Ladakh's separation the J&K Assembly was reduced to 83 but after the enactment of Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019, the strength was increased to 90. For the first time in its history, the J&K Assembly will have nine seats reserved for Scheduled Tribes. Seven seats will continue to be reserved for Scheduled Castes.

In the erstwhile J&K, Assembly seats were drawn under the J&K constitution and the J&K Representation of the People Act, 1957, which did not have any provision for reservation of seats for STs. P10

K'taka reports 5 Omicron cases

ENS @ Bengaluru

FIVE more people tested positive for the Omicron variant of SARS CoV2 in Karnataka, taking the state's tally for the new variant to 19.

In one of the cases, an 11-year-old girl tested positive for Covid, but her primary contacts are positive for Omicron. She got herself tested as the school demanded an RT-PCR test before allowing her to attend classes offline. Karnataka Health Minister Dr K Sudhakar on Monday morning tweeted, "There are five cases of Omicron confirmed in Karnataka. A 54-year-old male from Dharwad, 20-year-old female from Bhadravathi, an 82-year-old male and a 73-year-old female from Udupi, and a 19-year old female from Mangaluru."

Dakshina Kannada, which reported five Omicron cases on Saturday, saw another 19-year-old student from a cluster at a nursing college testing positive for the variant, taking the tally in the coastal district to six. She tested positive for Covid on December 12, after which her samples were sent for genome sequencing. She is the second girl from her college to test positive for Omicron. She was fully vaccinated in July and is asymptomatic. Her vitals are stable. CONTINUED ON: P3

NATIONWIDE	DEC 19	DEC 20	KARNATAKA	DEC 19	DEC 20
Fresh cases	7,081	6,563	Fresh cases	300	222
Recoveries	7,469	8,077	Recoveries	279	286
Deaths	264	132	Deaths	11	2

EXPRESS READ

WEF to defer Davos Annual Meeting 2022

New Delhi: The World Economic Forum on Monday said it will defer its Annual Meeting 2022 in Davos, Switzerland, in the light of continued uncertainty over Omicron. The meeting, which was scheduled to take place January 17-21, 2022, is now planned for early summer.

Investors lose ₹11.45 lakh cr in 2 days of market selloff

New Delhi: Investors have lost a whopping ₹11,45,267 crore in two days as domestic equity markets continued to face severe drubbing amid a global selloff. The BSE benchmark Sensex plunged 1,189 points or 2.09% to close at 55,822 on Monday | P13

State police open up, to recruit transgenders

BALA CHAUHAN @Bengaluru

IN a welcome, inclusive and progressive move, the Karnataka State Police (KSP) has made the first move and called for applications for the post of special reserve sub-inspector in KSRP and Indian Reserve Battalion (IRB) from men, women and transgenders.

The notification issued on Monday is the first by a government department in Karnataka calling for applications from the transgender community. The last date for applying for the 70 vacancies is January 18.

Karnataka is the first state to reserve jobs in public employment for transgender persons following a landmark direction of the Karnataka High Court in July this year. In response to a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) filed last year by a city-based NGO and rights group -- Sangama -- and social activist Nisha Gulur, represented by senior advocate BT Venkatesh, after vacancies for 2,467 posts for special reserve constable force and bandsmen arose, the "High Court in July 2021 ordered one per cent horizontal reservation for transgender people in all categories," said Venkatesh.

"This is the first step in India where in a government announced equal status for transgenders in its recruitment. The court direction to provide reservation is laudable," said Venkatesh. CONTINUED ON: P7

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